# On the Original Relationship between Religion and Science

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The bitter conflict between religion and science cannot be resolved unless it is resolved on the inescapable condition that the original independence of each is mutually acknowledged. Religion, taken on its own, must be able to subsist without any science, and science, taken on its own, without any religion. But how is this possible? That religion is not of scientific origin—revealed religion no more than myth—must surely be conceded; yet history teaches that science has scarcely opened its eyes before it begins to shake the received religion and to initiate the conflict. Among the Greeks it was above all the philosophers who led the assault. Xenophanes pointed out contradictions in the polytheistic popular belief; against the many gods he set unity, against their temporal origin eternity, against the inconstancy of their nature immutability, against their likeness to human beings their sublimity, and so on.[1] In the great poets one can trace a gradual transformation in the nature of the gods; in Euripides they begin to fall prey to reflection. The natural understanding draws the cultivated person closer. Art held fast to form, yet precisely the perfection of plastic form ate away at the reality of the gods. The Zeus at Olympia no doubt stood as a mediator between popular belief and the philosophically critical conception; but the impression was aesthetic, and the overpowering aesthetic impression smothered the religious. One may without exaggeration assert that the scientific thinking which undermined the authority of the Greek gods had a powerful ally in the plastic arts.

As regards the relationship between the revealed religion of the Old and New Testaments, the matter stands differently. Endowed with rich capacities, deep feeling,

[1] Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen*, Part I, 2nd ed., Tübingen 1856, p. 381.

magnificent imagination, sharp intellect, and powerful passions, the people of Israel were nevertheless not inclined, as the Greeks were, toward plastic art or penetrating scientific inquiry; they were, in world history, the people of Yahweh, in a distinctive sense the people of religion, the chosen people of revelation. An artistic imitation of the divine was forbidden, poetry stood entirely in the service of religion, and the critically testing science had no root in the national character. That the Mosaic law, with its higher ethics, does not permit thorough scientific investigation is evident. However much the Ten Commandments may appear to appeal to human reason, it is immediately striking that it is not reason's grounds, but Yahweh's word, on which the emphasis falls. One must note carefully that the same God who reveals his will in the general law also pronounces himself directly in the particular laws.

Concerning the tabernacle, Yahweh says (Exod. XXV): "And this is the offering which you shall receive from them: gold and silver and brass; blue and purple and scarlet and fine linen and goats' hair," and so on. "And the tabernacle (XXVI) you shall make with ten curtains … The length of each curtain shall be twenty-eight cubits and the breadth four cubits for each curtain, the same measure for all the curtains" … No one should say that these particular commandments exceed the capacity of reason; on the contrary, the supernatural, the incomprehensible to us, lies in this: that the Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, has spoken so precisely about curtains and loops and has left nothing whatever here to Moses' common sense. It is this that must strike reason here as utterly incomprehensible. In an analogous fashion, reason is humbled not only in the Old but also in the New Testament, when the supernatural breaks through so suddenly, so mightily, that nature cracks, the bonds of law burst, and the miracle occurs. Or is the incident with the Gadarene swine not equally as far above reason as the miracle (2 Kings XIII) of the dead man who fell into the grave of the prophet Elisha: "there came life into him, and he stood up on his feet"? In such incidents one sees a rupture between the divine revelation and human reason so complete that any reconciliation between religion and science must seem impossible. If revelation is to hold, then science must go; if science is to hold, then revelation must be dissolved: a hopeless dilemma.

We do not propose to dwell here on individual episodes from the controversies which for nearly two thousand years have been conducted between revealed faith and reason—controversies in which at one time religion has raised the ecclesiastical banner high and been on the verge of subjugating science, at another the victorious science, on behalf of affronted reason, has been on the point of dissolving religion. Our task is to go back to the original ground of the dispute, in order to investigate whether in that ground itself

there might not lie hidden a misunderstanding, an obscure conflation and confusion of religious and scientific cognition. Christ's words (John VIII:32): "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free," rise high above all partisan controversies, and must therefore benefit science and religion equally.

But, one objects, the truth that is to set us free must necessarily be consistent with itself in all things. If something, seen from one side, is indeed true, but from another side false, this lies not in the truth itself but in its presentation and apprehension. Even if all our cognition is fragmentary, the principle of cognition that corresponds to truth itself cannot be fragmented. Two mutually conflicting principles of cognition must presuppose two principally opposed and mutually conflicting truths, and that is entirely unreasonable. If religious cognition stands in manifest conflict with scientific cognition, this cannot mean that there are here genuinely two truths and for cognition two absolutely heterogeneous principles; rather, one of the two putative principles must necessarily be false—either the religious or the scientific one. If the religious principle has validity, then it must encompass the whole of truth, including the scientific; science can then make no claim to having a principle of its own. If on the contrary it is the scientific principle that has validity, then religion is in itself without principle, and must in all things be subject to the judgment of science. — We shall investigate in what follows how this matter stands.

That truth in the eternal sense must be one and indivisible, all will surely concede; yet truth's nature is in itself double-sided, neither merely something objective nor merely something subjective, but a cognitive unity of both. Without a cognizing subject there is no cognition, and without an object that is cognized there is likewise no cognition. Truth itself can therefore be neither the subjective in itself nor the objective in itself; the penetrating unity of subjective and objective must run through the whole of existence, embracing the entire reality with all its possibilities in the smallest as in the greatest. This the human being, with his imperfect cognition, must concede; but in so doing he concedes at the same time that in his limitedness he cannot possibly penetrate the content of absolute truth in its innumerable forms and concretions. If the human being is to truly cognize truth, then truth must divide itself; and it divides itself like light. As truth's light streams into human consciousness, it deposits two centers of cognition, two principles, each of which assumes its relative stamp from the Absolute—namely those of faith (*Tro*) and knowledge (*Viden*); the first concerns essentially the human being's own self, its inwardness, and is personal; the second concerns things and their essential interconnection, and is to that extent impersonal.

If one separates faith and knowledge from their corresponding principles, they would continually flow into one another. That faith cannot possibly do without all knowledge is just as evident as that knowledge cannot do without all faith. The believer must necessarily know what it is he believes in, and what believing means; just so, the knower must trust in his senses and his understanding. The skeptic who can trust in neither the one nor the other, not even in his own skepticism—since the truth is that there is no truth—is equally cut off from science and from religion.

There is a profound difference between religious and scientific faith, between religious and scientific knowledge. Religious faith has a psychic-ethical character and is essentially a matter of conscience, a purely personal affair; scientific faith does not concern the individual as such, but expresses confidence in the basic conditions and reality of science. Religious faith places knowledge of God and the supernatural far above acquaintance with the laws of reality and natural things: all corresponding knowledge receives its significance thereby alone. The supernatural cannot be perceived by the senses, yet must make itself known in an immediate way; it therefore assumes a sensory-supersensory form in the imagination, and through this makes an impression on the feelings: it reveals itself. Athena revealed herself to Achilles (*Il.* I, 194–98), Yahweh reveals himself to Abraham, to Moses, to the Prophets; even God's revelation in Christ is no exception to this. In the First Epistle of John I:1 we read: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life"; it might seem as if the supernatural were here directly confirmed by the senses and attested in a sensory manner; but when we compare this with (Matt. XVI, 15–17), where Jesus says to Peter, who acknowledges him as the Son of God, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven," we arrive at the full conviction that a true knowledge of the supernatural must be of supernatural origin. The knowledge that has religious faith as its foundation cannot therefore dissolve faith; when faith fades, the supernatural objects are immediately transformed into myths and imaginings—Yahweh and Christ as readily as Zeus and Athena. In this respect Anselm is undeniably right against Abelard with his *credo, ut intelligam*, for Abelard wished to reverse the relation.

It is otherwise in science. One may also say that scientific knowledge begins with faith; but partly, certainty about what is immediately present to consciousness is not faith but immediate knowledge; partly, everything that is provisionally assumed on faith, because it is assumed in untested confidence, is destined to be subjected to a test by which faith—in accordance with the Cartesian *de omnibus dubitandum est*—dissolves into

doubt, and when the doubt is resolved by grounding, transforms itself into knowledge. We begin by orienting ourselves in the world; senses, understanding, and reason work together in an immediate way; now it is the senses, now the understanding, that has one-sided predominance, while reason always requires that the reciprocal determination of what is perceived and what is thought be maintained, for on this scientific knowledge depends. As investigation begins concerning the difference between what in existence is changeable and what, as something unchangeable, must form the foundation of all changes, science takes its beginning. The task is to investigate the relationship between things and laws. Things are perceived; laws are thought; but since things can no more exist without laws than laws can be thought without things, perception and thought must originally presuppose each other in the unity of reason.

That religious and scientific cognition must, according to the characterization given, be essentially different is surely evident. Religious faith, which has its knowledge in imagination and self-feeling, glances at the natural world of things, assures itself of its transience, and grasps the supernatural; burdened by the law, it turns toward miracles and sees in them testimony that the free, almighty God is lord of the laws. The religious laws are laws of freedom, laws of upbringing, which can be altered according to time and circumstances, such as the laws concerning clean and unclean animals; the scientific laws—mathematical, mechanical, physico-chemical, and so on—belong, by contrast, so essentially to the nature of things that they cannot possibly be altered without nature itself being altered. All scientific laws are laws of necessity; if they could be broken or suspended, the whole world would collapse; science must therefore resolutely attack the miraculous in the name of reason.

There are those, to be sure, who consider this too harsh a claim. There are in reality certainly nodal points at which the supernatural and the natural, the miracle and the law, seem to clash; but this is only apparent: the new reality introduced by the miracle must, by entering into connection with the natural, conform its development to the law. Granted, one replies, in the hovering form of general propositions one can reconcile what is mutually contradictory—but what does it help when the contradiction shows itself in the fact itself? It is reported (Exod. III, 2–4) concerning the calling of Moses: "The angel of Yahweh appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a thornbush; and he looked, and lo, the thornbush was burning, yet the thornbush was not consumed. Then Moses said, I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the thornbush is not burnt. When Yahweh saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the thornbush, Moses, Moses! And he said, Here am I." How it is possible for faith to apprehend this

description, we can well enough understand, for faith sees everything in the light of imagination, and imagination knows how the supernatural combines with the rational, the validity of laws with the interruption of laws; but in knowledge and science it cannot be apprehended. Human knowledge is in all things—both sensory and intellectual—so strictly bound to the natural, the merely rational, that it can neither hear God speak as a human being nor see how a thornbush can continue to burn without being consumed by fire. It is therefore clear that an object of faith must be of an entirely different nature from an object of knowledge. If we place two natural scientists, one on each side of Moses, they would be able to see the thornbush, since it is an externally real object; but they could not possibly either see the angel or hear the word of Yahweh. The thornbush is an object of knowledge; the angel and Yahweh are objects of faith.

What can be inferred from this? That the cognition of knowledge, the cognition of the natural, must be common to all who are naturally gifted and make rational use of sense and understanding, while the cognition of faith, the cognition of the supernatural—if such cognition genuinely exists—is only possible for "the elect": for those who, with a special sense for the supernatural, can see what others cannot see, and hear what others cannot hear.

*[Sections II–IV: translation forthcoming.]*